DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 151 EA 012 064

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TITLE The Principal and Contract Management. A Survey Report.
PUB DATE 14 Sep 79
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Role; *Collective Bargaining; *Contracts; Elementary Secondary Education; Negotiation Agreements; *Principals; Teacher Administrator Relationship

ABSTRACT

Responses categorized in this report are from 173 principals to a 20-item survey from about the specific concerns of principals regarding contract management. Topics include attitudes of principals toward the negotiation process, leadership, time allocation, relationships with teachers and union officials, contract provisions, the effect of collective bargaining on educational programs and relations with communities, and the central office role. Findings considered significant are briefly discussed. Among the data are that 44 percent either regularly or sometimes perceived themselves "more as a contract manager than an educational leader"; 45 percent have altered their leadership style to accommodate the contractual emphasis; and 63 percent have had to allocate their time differently as the result of collective bargaining and the teacher contract. (MLF)

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THE PRINCIPAL AND CONTRACT MANAGEMENT - A Survey Report

by Dr. Gregory Benson, Executive Director of the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) and Part-time Lecturer in Educational Administration at the State University of New York at Albany*

Are you concerned about collective bargaining and your having to function within the boundaries established by a contract with the teachers? Apparently many school principals are, because "Contract Management" emerged as the major concern among the school administrators in the Capital District of New York State as they responded to a CASDA in-service Program Needs and Interests Survey conducted in the spring of 1978. The CASDA staff proceeded to plan a two-day workshop on the topic, but then decided that an effort should be made to gather more information about the specific concerns of principals regarding contract management. A survey instrument was therefore developed, with the help of some principals, and the survey was conducted in the spring of 1979. The survey form contained twenty items and it was sent to 360 principals in buildings housing different grade levels in an eleven county area. There were 173 principals who completed and returned the forms and they did indeed reveal some interesting concerns.

The twenty survey items and the major results are as follows:

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*The results presented and discussed are from a survey developed and conducted by five SUNY-Albany graduate students in educational administration (Gregory Aidala, George Neville, Ingrid Spatt, Gregory Trombly, Margery Diamond Zucker) working under the direction of Dr. Benson and Dr. Nelson Armlin, CASDA Associate Director.

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1. How would you describe your role in the negotiations process between teachers and the district?

   Very involved - 12%, Somewhat involved - 53%, Not involved - 37%, Don't know or doesn't apply - 2%.

2. If you are involved in the negotiations process, is your input reflected in the final negotiated contract with teachers?

   Yes - 18%, Sometimes - 53%, No - 7%, Not involved - 2%.

3. Do you perceive yourself more as a contract manager than an educational leader?

   Yes - 10%, No - 56%, Sometimes - 34%.

4. Have you altered your natural leadership style to accommodate the contractual emphasis?

   Yes - 45%, No - 52%, Dont' know - 3%.

5. Has the impact of collective bargaining and the resulting teacher contract caused you to allocate your time differently?

   Yes-drastically - 8%, Yes-moderately - 55%, No - 37%.

6. Do you have an advisory group of teachers that you consult with on a regular basis?

   Yes-contractual - 26%, Yes-principal's discretion - 43%, No - 30%, Not applicable - 1%.

7. Do you meet with the union leadership on a regular basis: To resolve conflict? To gather advice?

   Yes-to resolve conflict - 4%, Yes-to get advice - 6%, Yes-to resolve conflict and to get advice - 26%, No-for neither purpose - 62%, No response - 2%.

8. Are contract provisions adequate to allow the building principal flexibility to assign curricular and/or extra curricular work and yet maintain positive staff morale?

   Adequate for extra-curricular only - 1%

   Adequate for curricular only - 20%

   Adequate for both - 56%

   Inadequate for both - 21%

   Don't know - 2%

9. Do you perceive the grievance procedure as assisting you in implementing and administering the contract?

   Yes - 37%, No - 40%, No opinion - 23%.

10. Do you perceive the collective bargaining process and resulting contract as having any impact on the classroom instructional program in your building?

    Yes-positive impact - 12%, Yes-negative impact - 45%, No impact - 30%, Don't know - 13%.

11. Do you believe the total educational program has been positively or negatively affected by the collective bargaining process?

    Yes-positively affected - 13%, Yes-negatively affected - 59%, No effect - 14%, Don't know - 14%.

12. Do you believe that your relations with the community have been affected by the total process of collective bargaining?

    Yes-positively affected - 1%, Yes-negatively affected - 32%, No effect - 55%, Don't know - 12%.

13. Do you believe that there is general agreement by teachers and principals on the meaning of the contract?

    Yes - 75%, No - 17%, Can't tell - 8%.

14. Do you agree that teachers generally look more toward the union (president or building representative) for leadership than the building principal?

    Yes - regarding working conditions - 40%

    Yes - regarding educational leadership - 17%

    Yes - for both - 8%, No - I disagree - 50%, Don't know - 1%

15. Would you characterize the teachers in your building as militant or cooperative?

    Militant - 2%, Cooperative - 62%, Both - 35%, Neither - 1%.

16. Does your district have in-service programs for teachers and administrators about the contract?

    Yes- for teachers - 1%, Yes-for both - 3%, No - 96%.

17. Do you feel that you receive sufficient support from the Central Office in implementing the contract?

    Yes - 90%, No - 8%, Don't know - 2%.

18. Do you believe there is a need for more contract management consistency among principals in the district?

    Yes - 39%, No - 41%, No opinion - 20%.

19. Does Central Office formally educate you as to the interpretation of the contract?

    Yes-when needed - 62%, No - 30%, Not necessary - 8%.

20. Does Central Office formally educate you as to the management of the contract?

    Yes - 45%, No - 37%, Not necessary - 15%, Don't know - 3%.

The foregoing data are basically self-explanatory, but a few comments about some of the items seem appropriate. The fact that 44% of the responding principals either regularly or sometimes perceived themselves "more as a contract manager than an educational leader" has to raise some questions about the forces at work there. These principals may be so busy with managing the contract that they do not feel that they have the time or energy to continue to offer the educational leadership so essential for a dynamic school program. On the other hand, the other 56% of the principals still perceive themselves as educational leaders.

Forty-five percent of the principals have altered their leadership style to accommodate the contractual emphasis, and 63% have had to allocate their time differently, either "moderately" or "drastically", as the result of collective bargaining and the teacher contract. Universities with programs for school principals, and in-service agencies may want to examine these phenomena in greater depth. The data gave evidence that school principals currently holding office must take advantage of the professional literature, conferences, university courses, etc., to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to more effectively cope with the challenges of the new demands confronting them.

The answers to questions 10 and 11 should also give educators and other citizens some cause for concern - if the perceptions of responding principals may be considered valid. (Even if the perception is not valid, the evidence of a prevailing attitude should be of concern.) Forty-five percent of the principals feel that the collective bargaining process and the resulting contract have had a negative impact on the

programs of classroom instruction. And 59% feel that "the total educational program" has been negatively affected by the collective bargaining process. (Would principals be able to give teacher union representatives tangible evidence of this negative impact of collective bargaining and the resulting contract?) Add to the above, the fact that almost a third (32%) of the principals feel that their own relations with the community have been affected negatively, and we get further insights into the feelings of many principals. On the other hand, 62% of the principals characterized the teachers in their buildings as "cooperative." Only 2% said that their teachers were "militant," and 35% reported that their teachers were both "militant and cooperative."

The data for item 14 indicate that 25% of the principals believe that teachers look more toward the union for educational leadership than the building principal. Yet all the responses to item 15 indicate that 97% of the principals feel that the teachers in their buildings are cooperative. If that is true, might not the teachers continue to show the same cooperation and respond affirmatively if the principal exercised more positive leadership? Have some principals abandoned their educational leadership responsibilities--for whatever reason--and do we have union leaders stepping in to fill a void?

Ninety percent of the principals feel that they receive sufficient support from central office in implementing the contract. Central office administrators can be pleased with that statistic. But central office administrators do not fare as well on the next item because 39% of principals feel a need for more contract management consistency among principals in the district, an area in which central office should probably take the initiative.

The principals were invited to make comments, in addition to responding to the survey items, and twenty principals were also interviewed personally. A review of the comments made in writing and during the interviews emphasizes the great concern that many principals have about collective bargaining and contract management. The evidence seems to indicate that most principals have viewed the advent of the Taylor Law as a challenge to their leadership abilities and they have responded in a positive manner. Others feel that the contract has significantly usurped their administrative prerogatives and have indeed relegated themselves to contract managers. It reminds this writer of an allegation made by a New York State Education Department official many years ago at a school administrators' meeting. He said that too many principals were content to busy themselves with counting cafeteria money, making schedules, ringing bells, etc. He, of course, was appealing for more positive educational leadership.

It seems indisputable that collective bargaining and the resulting contracts are here to stay. Those principals who recognize this fact and the changes associated with it, will make the adaptations necessary for effective administration. Collective bargaining has brought problems, but it has also brought opportunities. Those principals who accept the challenge and who sharpen their administrative and leadership skills will undoubtedly achieve positive results for students entrusted to their care.

Author's note: The following bibliography prepared by Educational Research Service in August of 1979 provides a list of readings for those principals who would like to study the topic in greater detail.

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